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Presented to 22nd Meeting
Career Council 19 Apr 56

AIDS TO PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT

[Text of Memorandum to the Inspector General from a Senior Official]

"1. This memorandum has been written in order to put on paper some of the ideas we discussed on 10 February. Though fully aware that the Agency's personnel policies, procedures, and organization present extremely complex problems, in this memorandum I limit myself to one aspect of the problem of personnel management: the deficiencies in the quality and organization of information about our personnel now available to management. (I am using "management" to include the individual supervisor who handles people and who makes decisions about them, also the various boards and echelons of command which make or review personnel decisions.)

"2. It is axiomatic that our personnel are our most valuable, in fact, practically our only asset. We pride ourselves on the high caliber of our personnel, comparing them favorably with those in other government agencies and business. Nevertheless, disillusioned, often bitter, criticisms of our personnel management are the rule rather than the exception. From my own observation these criticisms are prevalent throughout the "working" or "troop" level and are directed at the inertia which seems to paralyze action in personnel matters, but even more at the personnel decisions which ultimately are made. As I said, the purpose of this paper is to suggest methods of improving the information on which decisions are made, not to attack the problem of over-complex organization and the subsequent inertia, though I believe there would be less inertia if management had more effective tools.

"3. I have no desire to judge the accuracy or fairness of the critics of our personnel management, but will attempt to list the types of personnel decisions which are questioned together with a few of the usual criticisms, put in parentheses:

a. The selection of personnel for employment. (Since we are hiring relatively few new people - except clericals - we can afford the highest standards and should be seeking the best qualified out of many candidates. We appear to have few objective standards for employment. If another emergency hits us, we may again find ourselves deluged with weak and inexperienced people, brought in at relatively high levels.)

Selection Board for GS11 and above
JOT for GS10 and below

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b. Placement: The transfer of employees from one position to another, often involving an increase in responsibilities and opportunity for promotion. Included in this category should be approvals for Agency or external training. Placement often requires "shopping" - the most bitterly criticized process in personnel handling. (Why is one man selected for a "good" job, when several others appear to have equal or better ability? In fact, it appears doubtful that more than one man was considered. Favoritism is suspected. To some, "shopping" of oneself is repugnant. Others became cynical hucksters. Why can't we insure that there is at least an element of competition for jobs by insisting that at least three men are considered for a position?)

Career Services to determine Toward duty

c. Promotions.

(Aside from minimum time-in-grade standards, there appear to be as many different promotion policies as there are career boards. Furthermore, most written promotion recommendations represent a supervisor's opinion, not always an unbiased summary of an employee's record. Therefore, career boards may not have all the relevant facts about the man under consideration nor even consider others of equal or greater merit.)

Promotion Boards

d. Termination, whether voluntary or "for the good of the Agency."
(Too many good men are resigning because they feel they have not had a fair deal; too few "dead-heads" are being fired.)

"4. Whatever the validity of the criticisms, management is blamed. Yet our "managers" are, on the average, men of genuine ability and good will. One of the real difficulties confronting management, however, is the fact that most personnel decisions must be based on information in the personnel files. As I intend to point out in more detail later, I fear that any given file will

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contain only some of the relevant data. Furthermore, the data will be so scattered throughout the file that no busy supervisor will bother to sort out the various bits and pieces, then evaluate and synthesize the facts into a reasonably meaningful picture of the person being judged.

Profile

"5. The sources for information about employees or candidates for employment are many, and not always in the personnel files. Obviously, personnel information, like intelligence information, will be of more or less importance, depending upon a variety of factors similar to those by which we judge intelligence information. I do not intend to go into the problem of evaluating, analyzing, and synthesizing personnel information, except to say that few supervisors or career boards have the time or competence to produce personnel intelligence. But I shall list the possible sources of data which occur to me, not in order of importance nor with any pretence that the list is exhaustive.

a. Personal History Statements
b. Pre-employment interviews
c. Pre-employment tests or "assessments"
d. Security investigation reports
e. Medical examinations, including psychiatric
f. Pre-training tests, including language aptitude and reading skills
g. Tested language ability
h. Training courses taken
i. Training evaluations
j. Fitness Reports
k. Commendations or the opposite, not included in Fitness Reports
l. Promotion Recommendations
m. Career Development Plans and comments thereon
n. Personal opinions - often oral - of co-workers
o. "Production" - that is, the reports, memos, cables, etc., an individual has written
p. Inspector General and Inspection and Review Reports

Selection Staff has access to all of these and uses all of them

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"6. It is not my contention that all personnel decisions require information from all these sources; however, if we applied our own principles of intelligence production, we would at least examine all possible sources to make sure that we had all the available and relevant facts. In other words, it is my belief that our personnel decisions, including the day-to-day handling of people - a subject I shall discuss later - are presently based on partial, fragmentary, out-dated, possibly biased, but certainly unorganized information. (Parenthetically, we might wonder how our customers would respond if we presented our intelligence product in similar form.) Since management is now forced to make personnel decisions without the benefit of organized, evaluated data, I believe we could give management a more effective tool if competent "evaluators" put all available and pertinent data into usable and understandable form. What might emerge would be what could be called, for want of a better term, a "personality profile."

"7. I do not intend to prescribe either the format of a profile or the range of information which it would include; however, I know what I, as a supervisor, have wanted to know about my subordinates and how difficult it has been to be sure I had all the facts. What we need to know includes the following - and probably more - objectively evaluated:

✓ a. Biography, including education and career before joining the Agency
✓ b. Agency experience - jobs held, training
✓ c. Summary of training evaluations, Fitness Reports, other opinions (commendations, etc.)
✓ d. Measurements of intelligence, language aptitude, etc.
✓ e. Tested language ability and other tested skills
o f. Medical factors
o g. Special considerations (family, personal habits and traits.)
o h. Summary analysis of above data (including consideration of any other information that may come from study of samples of "production", opinion of associates, etc.)

Executive Inventory

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"8. Though I risk being repetitious, I feel that our present system, which depends so often upon "looking at the files" before making a decision, starts with a hodge-podge of file data and ignores facts which, though vital, may not be in the file at all - for instance, a medical or psychiatric report, non-loyalty information developed by a security investigation, the subject's production. I therefore find it quite understandable that many personnel decisions appear unjust, arbitrary, or based on favoritism. In fact, the decision now made in favor of "good old Joe" because a "manager" knows him is apt to be as sound as one based on "let's look at the file." However, evaluated, meaningful information would help management make decisions about an individual's future development, to compare candidates for the same assignment, and to do a better job of handling people in day-to-day work. (NOTE: I am not suggesting that the power of decision be taken from the "managers"; rather, that they be given the tools.)

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"9. If what I am proposing has enough merit to bear further exploration, I suggest that a small task force be set up. One member should be a professional psychologist who could bring his scientific approach to the problem of evaluating data. This task force might take these steps:

a. First, examine a cross-section of personnel files from different components of the Agency to determine whether or not my rather unflattering comments about the utility of the files are valid.

b. Second, after finding what is in the files and how well or poorly organized the material is, determine what other needed information exists and whether or not it can be obtained for inclusion in the files.

c. Determine the possibility and usefulness of the profile approach, preferably by attempting to construct several profiles, then submitting the raw data and finished profiles to you for comparison.

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"10. The conclusions and recommendations the task force might reach should not be predicted; however, I should like to outline a few possible conclusions:

a. That the files now contain all really relevant information in well-organized usable form.

b. That the information is in the files, but is so mixed up with administrative paper that it is difficult to sort out. In which case, the recommendation might be that separate files containing only the types of information needed for managerial decisions be set up, leaving the administrative papers in the original files.

Senate Committee

c. That some useful facts are not in the files and should, therefore, be incorporated in the present files, or in separate files as suggested above. A system should also be established to insure the prompt flow of data to the files.

d. That the personality profile approach has sufficient merit to justify the setting up of a permanent board which would prepare profiles of present employees upon request and would also prepare profiles on new employees, whose files are still relatively virginal. Keeping these up-to-date should not be too difficult.

"11. In addition to positive recommendations, I imagine that the task force would come upon some interesting and illuminating corollaries. For example, I have been very glib about "relevant", "useful", "objective" personnel data. Just what do we mean? What "acts" do we look for when we examine a file, a promotion recommendation, or a key placement suggestion? How do we weigh, evaluate information about our people, information that may be contradictory and from unevaluated sources? As intelligence officers, we can do a

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fairly good job of evaluating and synthesizing intelligence information, but how adequate are we in handling information about our most priceless assets - our personnel? If several men are being considered for the same job, do we have standards that would ensure a decision fair to the men and in the Agency's best interest? Do we even have similar data to help us measure the relative fitness of men being considered for a given job? (That is, on one man we might have a full assessment, five training evaluations, and ten fitness reports; on another, no assessment or intelligence tests, no training evaluations - because the man has escaped training - and only two fitness reports.) This last point suggests yet another possibility, that the task force will come upon the need for certain standard measurements of all our people, tests of effective intelligence, at least, in addition to security and medical clearances.

"12. I should like to make a further suggestion concerning profiles and standards. Could we not construct profiles of intelligence officers who are, by common consent, our better operators, reporters, etc.? We might find that certain basic attributes are common to these "successful" officers - or that there are no common denominators pointing to success. The task force, I believe, will have to consider this question if a meaningful set of facts is to be sought as a basis for the preparation of a profile.

"13. I previously stated that I would return to the problems of day-to-day personnel management and how personality profiles might assist a supervisor. It is obvious that the more a supervisor knows about the strengths and weaknesses of his people, the better he will be able to handle them from the beginning. As a supervisor, I have had both happy and unhappy experiences. In one instance, a complete assessment report enabled me to develop a man to his maximum without subjecting him to certain pressures he presumably would have broken under. In another case, because I did not have access to the results of a medical examination, a man was overworked and became seriously ill. If a supervisor has only partial knowledge of his people, men will inevitably be given responsibilities too great, or insufficient, will be urged into operations for which they are not trained or qualified, or into efforts at analysis or composition for which they have no talent.

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To be sure, over a period of time supervisors learn to know their people; but how much better it would be if we could begin handling a man just assigned to us with the accumulated and evaluated facts about the man in our possession. This would be particularly helpful to the overseas Station Chief, who usually gets no information, or an absolute minimum, about people joining his staff.

"14. In conclusion, I should like simply to repeat my main theme: that personnel management can be no better than the tools it has to work with. It goes without saying that poor or careless workmen can misuse good tools; however, failure to use tools properly could be more easily corrected by higher management if the upper echelons knew that good tools had been available. In other words, reviews of decisions would be easier and more just if the same organized, evaluated facts were available to both levels of command."

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